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Jim

## **Explanation of Community relations vs Public Relations vs Communication Strategy**

We were discussing the difference between community affairs, public relations and communications strategy in relationship to the EPA's investigations in Florida. I thought I would write an explanation for you to consider.

**Community relations** – usually refers to a function that provides a point of contact for the public, issues factual information and creates a method for the community to express their views. e.g. public meetings.

**Public relations campaigns** – are used to make an announcement. A good public relations campaign would create an announcement using different messages for different audiences and distribute them via the most appropriate media. Press launches, one to one meetings, phone interviews are all used to influence the media to write your point of view. The better pr is implemented, the more favourable the results. So, background information is important, facts and statistics, anticipating questions, and sound bites are all important. However, at the end of the day you can't completely control what is reported.

**Communication Strategy** – Is used when the issue is more complex, high profile or ongoing and it is planned not reactive. A communication strategy outlines clear objectives. It looks at all aspects of what needs to be communicated, and to whom, to meet those objectives. It uses pr as tool, but also looks at other methods of communicating where you can remain in control of the message. Advertising, letters, direct mail, newsletters, internet site, emails, phone canvassing are some of the tools that allow you to keep control of the messages.

A communication strategy also looks at the best way to communicate to a group. Let me give you an example, this investigation could upset several different groups. Therefore, if the EPA can gain support or at least reduce the resistance from the environmental groups it would be helpful.

This means the EPA needs to speak directly to the environmental group/industry. It is not appropriate for these groups/individual to read about this investigation in the paper. First, the messages in the paper should be directed to the general public. There should be a different (more targeted) set of messages and information for the environmental groups. Second, it creates animosity. They will feel threatened. They will have people asking them questions as soon as the EPA makes an announcement and they do not want to look inept. So, this group needs to be told directly. However, they should not be told too far in advance.

A good communication strategy anticipates issues and pre-empts negative comments that could arise from such groups as industry, business and city leaders who see the investigation as a threat to their economic community and other environmental groups. It also tries to avoid other negative consequences such as creating undue worry amongst the public.

The other major benefit of a communication strategy is that so much of it is written and prepared that EPA's positioning on different topics can be agreed and signed off to the appropriate level. The information is of better quality and is more in-depth which allows EPA to speak with more confidence, authority and provide independent views that support their messages. The background material, releases to the different audiences and FAQs all provide the EPA team members involved in the project an agreed set of reference material for their own use.

This is a brief overview of why a communication strategy allows would you to improve your ability to control the messages, increases your authority, reduces negative press, increase the effectiveness and reputation of the EPA. I hope you find this explanation helpful. - JP

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